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October 23, 2012

PENNS VALLEY RAIL TRAIL PROJECT

MINUTES OF STUDY COMMITTEE MEETING NO. 1

7:00 – 9:00 PM, October 9, 2012

ROOM 106, OLD GREGG SCHOOL, SPRING MILLS, PA

ATTENDEES:

GREGG TOWNSHIP

Pat Leary, Doug Bierly, Supervisors

Jane Scheuchenzuber, Planning Commission

CENTRE COUNTY PLANNING

Mike Bloom, Senior Transportation Planner

CONSULTANTS:

Glenn Vernon, Claudia Albertin, Albertin Vernon Architecture, LLC

Brian Auman, Landscape Architect

GENERAL PUBLIC (in the order they signed in)

Julie Smith	equestrian, local business owner	814 422-0370	juls8957@aol.com
Trish Meek	Centre Regional Planning	814 231-3050	tmeek@crcog.net
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	Property Owner		
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MEETING MINUTES:

Pat Leary, Supervisor for Gregg Township, welcomed everyone and thanked them for participating in the Study Committee for the Penns Valley Rail Trail Feasibility Study.

Mike Bloom, Senior Transportation Planner with the Centre County Office of Planning, asked everyone to introduce themselves, described the consultant selection process (RFP's based on PA DCNR standards, 12 firms responded, 4 chosen for interviews, reference checks,), and then introduced the consulting team selected for the project: Claudia Albertin and Glenn Vernon, with Albertin Vernon Architecture, and Brian Auman, Landscape Architect.

Mike then turned the floor over to Glenn Vernon, project manager for the team.

Glenn provided a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of the team highlighting the rail trail teams organizational structure, work and credentials (Slides 1-4) and then described the feasibility process for this project (Slides 5-30).

Slide 5: **Origins of the Greenways and Trails Movement in America,**

1. growing concerns about obesity in America, including especially disturbing trends about childhood obesity;
2. the 1987 *President's Commission on Americans Outdoors* recommendations that included a network of greenways and trails connecting communities;
3. Charles Little's 1990 "how-to" guidebook, **Greenways for America**, that helped the greenways and trails movement really take off as a grass roots style community building initiative.

Slide 6: **Pennsylvania adapts it own greenways and trail plan,**

1. visualized as a network of greenways and trails as recognizable as the state highway system, connecting communities to each other and to their natural, cultural and historic resources;
2. enabled by a mandate that each county in the Commonwealth adapt its own Greenway Plan as a component of its Comprehensive Plan;
3. tie-in to Richard Louv's concerns about "nature deficit disorder" described in his bestselling book, **Last Child in The Woods**, urging parents to overcome their fears about letting children play outdoors, and
4. Louv's follow-up book, **The Nature Principle**, making a similar argument for grownups, focused on the restorative powers of nature as a therapeutic counterbalance to our technological dependencies

Slide 7: **Centre County provides its own Greenways and Trails Plan**

1. A response to state mandated update of its countywide comprehensive plan,
2. County plan recommendations include exploring the feasibility of a rail trail linking the college communities of State College (Penn State) and Lewisburg (Bucknell) through rural Penns Valley along the former Lewisburg & Tyrone (L&T) rail line right of way
3. Gregg Township was actually ahead of the County, had already been exploring a trail along same alignment through Spring Mills
4. County Plan recommendation credentialed the project for grant from DCNR to explore feasibility.

Slide 8: **What this feasibility study will try to answer:** is this rail trail project- or some portion of it-feasible?

7 Specific Questions the Penns Valley Rail Trail (PVRT) Feasibility Study will try to answer:

1. **Political Feasibility**- is there widespread support in the community for the project?
2. **Legal Feasibility**- who owns the rail right of way now, what alternate routes are available around sections where property owners can't or won't permit access?
3. **Market Feasibility**- is there sufficient demand for the trail, who will use it?
4. **Physical Feasibility**- what are the physical opportunities and constraints along the right of way?
5. **Trail Design**- how long will it be, how wide, can we phase it?
6. **Financial Feasibility**- how much will it cost, where will the money come from, what financial impacts (tourism, job creation/retention, healthier communities, etc.) might result from the trail?
7. **Management Feasibility**- how will the trail be operated, managed and maintained?

Slide 9: **Designing a Robust Public Process**

1. We were told that one of the strongest aspects of our proposal was a "robust public process"
2. We believe the community- not us- should be the ones who decide whether this project -or some portion of it- proceeds (or does not)
3. So our primary role will be to provide the community with the kind of information they need to make wise choices

Slide 10: **5 Study Committee Meetings**

1. We think of the Study Committee as both a resource and as our sounding board
2. Some consultants lobby for smaller committees because they think it will be more manageable for them
3. We believe a bigger committee is better than a smaller committee, because it gives us a fuller understanding of the concerns and the aspirations of the community, and actually makes our job easier

Slide 11: **4 Public Meetings**

1. We view the 4 public meetings not only as a way to give the public a chance to see what we are doing
2. It's also a way for them to become actively engaged in the process
3. Engagement requires a purposeful act, so we plan on making the meetings as interactive as possible

Slide 12: **One-on-One Meetings**

1. Oftentimes we get more candid and useful information from one-on-one interactions at the grocery store or the meat market than at public meetings
2. Some of that feedback has already started filtering in
3. It's one of the reasons we presented our team as the "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" team- we get up to the minute feedback because we're actually here to hear it

Slide 13: **Crafting Our Messages**

1. We recognize that if we want to really engage the community in this project, i.e., we want to get their attention, we might need to reach out in ways that other people who are very effective at communicating have perfected

Slide 14: **Social Media**

1. We understand the opportunities **and** the limitations of social media
2. So we plan to use social media as a way to augment, rather than replace the more traditional tools we have to engage the public

Slide 15: **Legal Feasibility**

1. Unlike the recently opened Buffalo Valley Rail Trail between Lewisburg and Mifflinburg, the right-of-way for this project appears to have been legally "abandoned", so we have many owners to deal with, not just one
2. We respect and accept each property owner's right to choose whether to be part of this rail trail, or to choose not be part of it
3. We look forward to working with those who choose to be part of it, and will look for alternate routes around those who choose not to
4. Railroad rights-of-way are said to be one of the most complicated title searches in real estate
5. Which is what we will be trying to get a handle on for the next several months

Slide 16: **Historical Perspective**

1. We were told that our passion for history was another reason the selection committee chose our team
2. Our love of history is more for the lessons it teaches us, than nostalgic yearnings for days gone by
3. Understanding local history also gives us an appreciation for the values this community holds collectively
4. So we're excited that there are several historians on our study committee

Slides 17-19: **Physical Inventory & Analysis**

1. We plan on spending as much time as possible in the field so we can discover what we can't collect from a GIS layer on a screen
2. Understanding people's concerns before we put pencil to paper will help us design around them before we become too married to a direction that doesn't work
3. A primary objective of the trail will be to link communities to each other and to as many historical, cultural and natural features as possible

4. But we know we must do that in a way that preserves and protects the qualities that contribute to the rural character of this valley and to the unique character of each of the small towns it joins

Slides 20,21 **Trail Design**

1. We believe that trail design is more than connecting point A to point B in the most economical way possible
2. It's more about discovering how to create a ribbon of green that adds value to the communities by connecting them to each other and as many of the resources around them that contribute to the life and culture of the region
3. We hope to capture the magic that so many visitors feel when they discover our region

Slides 22-24 **Identifying Interpretive Opportunities**

1. We think of interpretation not as instruction, but as a form of provocation
2. We know that people only become engaged when we activate both the left (emotional) and the right (intellectual) sides of their brains
3. So we hope to encourage people to think beyond the conventional history-on-a stick (or 2 sticks) type of interpretive media that people quickly read and just as quickly forget
4. And to imagine ways to tell the stories of this place that are provocative and memorable

Slide 25 **Demand Analyses and Trail Use**

1. The Buffalo Valley Rail Trail connecting Lewisburg to Mifflinburg just completed a Trail User Survey after its 1st year of use
2. That analysis will give us an excellent understanding of how this trail might perform in its 1st year
3. We can also learn a lot from other trails that have been in existence longer, since trail usage grows when recognition of the trail increases
4. It's easy to be wrong about who we think trail users will be versus who actually uses trails
5. The photo in this slide that a Facebook friend posted today shows 4 young Mennonite women from Lancaster hiking the Old Loggers Trail
6. Einstein was famous not just for relativity, he also was famous for his daily walks with colleagues through Princeton Woods, which he claimed helped him think clearer when he returned

Slide 26 **Trail Operation, Maintenance & Security**

1. Many rail trail projects start with a first mile, and then grow as people recognize that the issues they feared, like trash, don't materialize, or they see the beneficial aspects that do
2. As a rule, people do "inappropriate" things in dark alleys and abandoned rail lines where nobody is watching, not on active rail trails, where friends and neighbors might see them
3. Some of the most vocal opponents of the Pine Creek Rail Trail became its most vocal advocates after the trail was built because it revitalized their economy and the things they feared might happen didn't

Slide 27 **Financial Feasibility**

1. Once we have a design and an alignment, we will prepare cost estimates based on industry standard cost models
2. We also will estimate costs to operate and maintain the trail
3. There are also studies we can use to identify Intangible benefits of trails, like health benefits to a community, and direct economic impacts, like job creation and retention from tourism, and trail related services, like B&B's, outfitters, and eateries

Slide 28, 29 **Schedule & Next Steps**

1. We estimate the feasibility study will take approximately 18 months to complete, give or take a season
2. Our goal is not to crank this project out as quickly as possible
3. Our goal is to build enough time into the schedule to allow stakeholders to become engaged in the process
4. Our next priorities will be to meet with key property owners and start mapping opportunities and constraints along the potential right of ways
5. Once we have some of that information mapped, we will schedule another meeting with the study committee, and the first public meeting shortly thereafter

Slide 30 **Q&A**

Glenn invited everyone to offer suggestions on the process, any information or reports they might be aware of of that might be helpful to the process, and the 20 most important people they thought we should meet with for our key person interviews.

The following comments were recorded on 3 large tablets at the front of the room, and are summarized below, with responses by the consulting team following any questions.

SUGGESTIONS ON BACKGROUND INFORMATION WE SHOULD HAVE

1. Look to other existing trail examples, how they developed, how they were funded
2. Regional Comprehensive Plan
3. Railroad book on logging roads, Pitch Pine & Prop (??) Timber; Wildcatting on the Mountaintop

SUGGESTIONS FOR 20 KEY PEOPLE WE SHOULD MEET WITH:

1. Dennis Hameister
2. Oak Hall Quarry owners
3. Chris Exarchos
4. Bill Gettig
5. Lemont Village Association
6. Dale Musser
7. Bill Homan
8. Josh Cunningham
9. Albrights
10. George Dickinson

11. The Spring Mills Fish & Game Association
12. Mark Kauffman
13. Don Myers
14. Joel Myers
15. Lions Club
16. East Penns Valley Women's Club
17. Centre Hall Women's Club

GENERAL COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS ON PROCESS

1. **It sounds like ownership issues here will be complex.** Yes, railroad rights of way are some of the most complicated real estate issues, which is why that is where we are starting our study, but our focus also will be on Gregg Township, and elsewhere we will be looking from a 30,000 foot perspective.
2. **Is there a plan to do any particular segment first?** Prioritizing trail segments will evolve over time based on outcome of study, however, we already know that Gregg Township has an interest in moving this project forward. Gregg Township has taken granting of trail in lieu of fee, and has protected the corridor on their official map. Gregg Township has also accepted liability for corridor segments granted to the township, which has shifted the burden of liability from the property owners to the township at no cost to the township
3. **Other trails have done this on their own, couldn't we do that too?** Yes, that's actually where this project started, but after meeting with DCNR and the County Planners, the Township decided to explore this option for now, since it fits within both DCNR and the County's greenway plans, which may make it eligible for future grants as well, but will not preclude that possibility as a future option.
4. **Why was the Buffalo Valley Rail Trail so expensive?** The Buffalo Valley Rail Trail used federal funds, and therefore, was subject to federal highway standards.
5. **Will this trail be a non-motorized trail only?** Yes, that is the criteria under which the DCNR grant was applied for and the RFP was based on, so that is how **we are proceeding at this point.**
6. **What happens if a property owner doesn't want the trail on their property, but the neighboring property owners do?** We plan to respect the wishes of all property owners, so in that case, we would try to find an alternate route around the property owner who opts out. We can't reach everyone, so it's important that everyone on this committee share what they know. We are willing and interested in meeting with groups of property owners, residents and other stakeholders.
7. **What about people who use the trail to access areas of their land?** Each case will be different, so there is no single answer to that question, but we would like to know that as early as possible so we can either build that into the trail design, or find an alternate route if that is not possible to address the issue to their satisfaction.
8. **Are there short term ways to allow owners to have use for things that happen occasionally, like logging?** That's a more difficult situation, because logging can really tear a trail up, but we'd definitely want to meet with that owner and see if there was some way we could make it work. For example, there could be a restoration agreement where the owner could use the trail for a specified period with the understanding that they would have to repair any damage.
9. **What about people who think they own the right of way, and will force you off the tracks, but they really don't own it or have that right?** There are a lot of people out there with different views about rail

trails and rights of ownership, and we know we will be encountering many of them. Any help on becoming better aware of their sensitivities before we meet will be appreciated.

10. **How can people reach us?** Albertin Vernon is the principal contact for this project; our phone number is (570) 725-2603, but the best way to reach us if you have internet access is by email at GLENN@albertinvernon.com, or CLAUDIA@albetinvernon.com.
11. The possibility of a Lemont Trailhead was suggested.
12. Jane Scheuchenzuber mentioned the possibility of a 911 Memorial Trail connection. The trail has been designated along portions of the route, and they will be watching the progress of this project as a possible connection through this area.

for Albertin Vernon Architecture, LLC



Glenn A. Vernon, Architect

These minutes were prepared for the benefit of those who attended the meeting, as well as for those who were not able to be there. They reflect our understanding of what generally transpired during the meeting, but we also welcome any written opinions or comments that reflect a different understanding by others who attended the meeting. Such comments or opinions should be sent to GLENN@albertinvernon.com, or to Albertin Vernon Architecture, LLC, 269 Logan Mills Road, Loganton, PA 17747, within the next 10 days, after which these minutes will otherwise stand as the official record of the meeting.